

What Can I Do to Help My Loved One?

Since each individual's experience is unique, there is no one-size-fits-all remedy for victimized loved ones. For those who care about a person who has experienced a violent trauma, finding ways to be helpful and maintaining a healthy relationship can be challenging. Following are some tips to help your loved one who has been victimized.

Listen. Talking about the experience, when the survivor is ready, will help acknowledge and validate what has happened to him or her and can reduce stress and feelings of isolation. Let your loved one take the lead, and try not to jump in with too many comments or questions right away.

Research. If the victim wants more information, would like to report a crime, or has other questions, you can help find answers and resources.

Reassure. As strange as it may sound, survivors often question whether an incident was their fault or what they could have done to prevent the crime against them. They may need to hear that it was not their fault and be assured that they are not alone.

Empower. Following trauma, victims can feel as though much of their lives is beyond their control. Aiding them in maintaining routines can be helpful, as can offering survivors options or possible solutions.

Be patient. Every journey through the healing process is unique. Try to understand that it will take time, and do what you can to be supportive. The healing process has no pre-determined timeline.

Ask. Your loved one may need help with any number of things or have questions on many different topics. Even a favor as mundane as running a few errands or taking the dog for a walk can be a big help, so consider lending a hand.

Where Can I Find More Information?

The healing process takes time, and many questions, hurdles, and frustrations may surface along the way.

Contact Information

SAMHSA's Mental Health Services Locator

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases

SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center

1-800-789-2647

1-866-889-2647 (tdd)

SAMHSA's Toll-Free Substance Abuse Treatment Referral Helpline

1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

SAMHSA's Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator

www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Witness Justice

www.witnessjustice.org

Witness Justice provides an opportunity to connect with other survivors and experts from a wide range of professional fields, as well as access to timely and pertinent information about trauma, mental health, and the healing and criminal justice processes.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Mental Health Services
www.samhsa.gov

Supporting the Survivor



A guide to understanding the impact
of violent trauma on your
loved ones and how you can help them

In the United States, your odds of falling victim to violence at some point in your lifetime are high. Even if you don't encounter violence directly, chances are that you know someone who has or will experience trauma. While a victim copes with the direct impact of trauma, those close to the victim also struggle in the aftermath.

What do I say? What do I do? Why does my loved one seem so distant?

This brochure is intended to help you begin to understand what happens to many victims of violent crime and what you might do to help them along the healing process.



How Does Trauma Affect Survivors?

Victims of violence often face a wide range of struggles. They often question what has happened or what they may have done to cause or prevent it. Many wonder how they will heal and why they cannot connect with their loved ones as they once did. It is also common for survivors to feel anger or frustration as they ponder whether they will ever feel "normal" again. While every survivor's experience is unique, violent trauma is almost always a life-changing experience that can affect everything from one's ability to sleep to his or her ability to concentrate at work.

Understanding the nature and impact of trauma can be key to helping your loved one. Many survivors find themselves in unfamiliar and distressing psychological territory. It is common for them to endure intense feelings of isolation, insecurity, and fear, and their most treasured relationships often suffer as a result. Trauma can also lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which may include both substance abuse and mental health problems.

Violent Trauma, Substance Abuse, and Mental Health Concerns

Many victims turn to alcohol or other substances in an attempt to get some relief from their emotional turmoil and suffering. All trauma survivors manage their experiences in different ways. However, substance abuse is not only ineffective in healing from trauma, but it also can present a host of additional problems that make the healing process even more difficult.

Violence is also a widely recognized catalyst for mental health concerns such as PTSD, a condition that can be caused by experiencing or observing virtually any kind of deep emotional or physical

trauma. Millions of people in the United States suffer from PTSD, resulting from many different types of trauma—from enduring years of domestic violence to a single violent attack that lasts but a few seconds. PTSD is characterized by both emotional and physical suffering; many afflicted by it find themselves unintentionally revisiting their trauma through flashbacks or nightmares. PTSD can make a survivor feel isolated, disconnected, and "different" from other people, and it can even begin to affect the most routine activities of everyday life. Psychologists and counselors with experience in treating trauma survivors can be very helpful in working through PTSD, and there are prescription drugs available to help ease PTSD symptoms. PTSD is a potentially serious condition that should not be taken lightly.

According to a recent study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the most effective way to combat trauma, substance abuse, and mental health problems is through an integrated, holistic approach, taking into account how each individual problem affects the others. To begin, it can be helpful for a survivor to share experiences and concerns with a service provider who can assist in developing a plan to address these struggles comprehensively.



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